

## The Book Shrek! and its Adaptation Shrek (movie): A Study Exploring the Journey from Narration to Animation with the help of Reader-response and Audience – response Theories

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**Abstract:** Literature in the form of narratives and its adapted cinematic visualization has always supported each other as statistics proves that a skillful movie adaptation increases the selling of the source text. The paper is an attempt to broaden the insight and discuss the interdisciplinary of written literature and adapted literature with the help of reader's response theories and audience response theories. The genre that has been selected for study is Animation. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section is the comparative study of structure and techniques (narrative and cinematographic) used in the selected narrative i.e. *Shrek!* written by William Steig and its adaptation *Shrek* directed by directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson. The second section applies the reader's response and audience' response theories in order to find out how a little known "Shrek" character of book named *Shrek* became famous in animated movie of same name *Shrek* after eleven years of the publication of book and proved that even a gigantic ogre can be a loving figure for the audience. The third section of the paper is the conclusion which reveals the exploration of all the possibilities as how a not so known book gathers popularity from young as well as adult audience when adapted into an animated movie.

### INTRODUCTION

Today the world of movies is so enticing and appealing to the young generation that many of the teenagers have lost the habit of reading. It seems like 'child is the father of man' has become true today with watching a movie outshining reading a novel. A film study which has had genesis in literature has become an independent field of study. Still the books continue to attract the world of cinema with adaptations garnering more praise at times while completely failing to appeal to the audience at other times. Philosophical thoughts incite man's mind more if read, while romance appeals to the imagination more with visuals. Thus lays the difference between the reader's response and the audience's response. This difference in responses also at times results in variations in narrative technique of the writer and the cinematographic narrative of the director. As Isaac Babel said that "a well-thought-out story doesn't need to resemble real life. Life itself tries with all its might to resemble a well-crafted story." (goodreads.com). The narrative technique makes it so.

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Talking of Animation, it has come out as the technique in which each frame is produced individually either spawned from computer graphics or photographing a drawn image with the help of animation camera (wikipedia.org). Focusing on the aesthetic taste and interest of the children Animation contributed a lot towards making story characters immortal. Presently, animated movies encompass young as well as adult audiences by their marvelous way of presenting narratives. One of the best examples is *Shrek* written by William Steig which was not at all known to people but when adapted into an animated movie, it broke all the records of success.

*Shrek!* is picture book written by William Steig in 1990. ‘Shrek’ is a German and Yiddish term ‘Schreck’ which means ‘fear’ or ‘fright’. It is the story of a young ogre named Shrek who is very weird and uglier than his father and mother whom he lives with:

*Shrek was uglier than the two of them put together. By the time he toddled, Shrek could spit flame a full ninety-nine yards and vent smoke from either ear. With just a look he cowed the reptiles in the swamp. Any snake dumb enough to bite him instantly got convulsions and died.*

Later on he leaves his home to find some adventure and excitement in life. In his way he scares everyone including trees and flowers. Finally he meets a witch who directs him to go ahead and meet a talking donkey who will lead you to the princess who is uglier than you and you can marry her. Rest of the story is all about Shrek’s journey with a donkey to find the princess and finally getting married to her.

*So they got hitched as soon as possible. And they lived horribly ever after, scaring the socks off all who fell afoul of them.*

Earlier the rights of this was bought by Steven Spielberg but later on producer John H. Williams brought the book to the DreamWorks and the concept was liked by the co-founder Jeffery Katzenberg. So, finally DreamWorks acquired the rights of the book and started working on it. In 2001 came the movie *Shrek* which created a history on the box office and apart from that won the first ever Academy Award for the best Animated Feature. Its tremendous success led the makers to come up with sequels like *Shrek 2* (2004), *Shrek the Third* (2007) and *Shrek Forever and After* (2010) and all result in a huge success.

*Shrek*, the movie loosely adapted from the above discussed book is a computer-generated animated fancom (fantasy and comedy) film presented by DreamWorks Pictures in 2001. This movie, directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson, featured interesting characters voiced by well known actors like Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz and John Lithgow. The audiences watch the story of Shrek, an irritable, terrifying green ogre who loves to be alone in his swamp, eating and bathing all the day and he ridicules the concepts of fairytales like emotional feelings, love, friendship, sympathy etc. One day he meets a donkey who happens to be a ‘talking donkey’ and finds that his swamp is forcefully taken by King Farquaad of DuLoc. King Farquaad offers him a deal that he can get his swamp back only when he will bring Princess Fiona (locked in a castle guarded by a ferocious dragon) to him. In reality, King’s vicious desire is to marry Fiona and become a mighty King. Shrek accepts the offer and goes out with the donkey in search of Fiona. Finally they rescue the princess from the castle but Fiona gets shocked by seeing an ogre instead of a Prince. Firstly, they argue and fight with each other but slowly their closeness grows as they find that most of their habits are same. Shrek, too, during this journey

reveals his suppressed feelings and emotions and proves that even an Ogre can have a heart which needs love and compassion. With the progress of the story we also come to know that Princess Fiona is cursed as she transforms into an ogress every night after the sunset and this spell can be broken only when she gets a true love's kiss. Unknown to this truth, Shrek misunderstands Fiona and sends her with King Farquaad in return for his swamp. Later on, persuaded by the donkey, Shrek realizes his mistake and runs to meet Fiona where she is going to marry King Farquaad. He reaches there tells her that King is using her to be a king. He is not her true love and before Fiona could react the sun sets and she changes into an ogress. Outraged by seeing this King Farquaad tries to punish them but he himself gets engulfed by the dragon. At the end, Shrek expresses his love for Fiona and proposes her. They share a kiss and magic happens, Fiona transforms into an ogress forever as the spell goes '*By night one way, by day another. This shall be the norm until you find true love's first kiss and then take love's true form*'. Shrek feels happy seeing that and calls Fiona as the most beautiful person in the world. In this way the story ends with a happy note.

The comparative study of the book *Shrek!* and its adaptation *Shrek* structurally is quite interesting. The stories in both the media visualize the life of an ogre named Shrek who is surprisingly the protagonist. That means we are talking about an anti-fairy tale as in fairy- tales kings, knights used to be our heroes and ogres, devils, magicians are portrayed as the villains. In spite of dealing with this unique theme, the book *Shrek!* couldn't reach to the hearts of the readers as they didn't feel any kind of connection with the characters. On the contrary, when the same theme was adapted into a movie, the audience instantly accepted the Ogre Shrek as their weird but loving hero. From the structural point of view the narrative of *Shrek* somehow reversely supports the Character Theory proposed by Russian formalist critic Vladimir Yacovlevich Propp (1895-1970) according to whom there is 7 broad character types:

- The Hero, the central character who struggles, seeks, wins and finally weds the princess: In the book, the projected hero Shrek doesn't have any hero-like quality and he enjoys being disliked by the people and in the adapted movie too, at first it is shown that the ogre Shrek lives alone in his swamp and loves to be a hideous creature whom people are scared of.

*Wherever Shrek went, every living creature fled. How it tickled him to be so repulsive. (p.6)*

*Shrek: (to the people) Ogres, they are much worse. They'll make suits from your freshly peeled skin. They'll shave your liver, squeeze the jelly from your eyes. Actually it is quite good on toast.*

*Then he roars and shoos them away shouting in a loud voice "Stay Out".*

In the book and the movie both, Shrek goes out in search of a princess but circumstances and intentions are completely different yet interestingly at the end the hero (Ogre) marries the princess.

- The Villain also known as antagonist who stands against the Hero: In the book, the dragon and the Knight are acting as villain as they are shown blocking the path of Shrek who is on his way to find the princess (sarcastically, uglier than him). In the adapted movie, some changes are made with the inclusion of characters and thus Lord Farquaad can be assumed to be the villain.

- The Donor who inspires or helps the Hero by giving some magical object: In the book, the Witch is the Donor who sends Shrek on a mission to rescue the princess with the help of a donkey while in book there is no such character.

*Otchky- potchky, itchky-pitch*

*Pay attention to the witch*

*A donkey takes you to a knight*

*Him you conquer in a fight*

*Then you wed a princess who*

*Is even uglier than you.*

*Ha ha ha and cockadoodle,*

*The magic words are 'Apple Strudel'. (p.5)*

- The Helper who helps the hero in his quest: The Donkey has played the role of Helper but in the book it doesn't acquire much importance in comparison to the movie as the Donkey voiced by Eddie Murphy is so humorous and adorable that anybody would fall for it.

- The Princess is sought by the hero and finally gets married to him: The role of princess narrated in the book is very short and somewhere leaves the reader in utter dissatisfaction while in the movie the character of princess Fiona has been beautifully developed and she has her own secret story that was loved and appreciated by the audience when watched.

- The Dispatcher helps the hero by giving him a purpose

- False Hero is the character that falsely assumes the role of the 'hero' but later on emerges as an evil.

The traces of these characters can be found in the King Farquaad who arrogates Shrek's swamp and puts forward a condition that Shrek will get his swamp back when he will bring Princess Fiona for him. At first Princess Fiona too thinks that King Farquaad is her true love but later on she realizes that it is Shrek whom she actually loves and when at the end after sharing a kiss with Shrek, Fiona assumes the form of an Ogress, Shrek opens his heart out and addresses her as the most beautiful lady in the world.

*Shrek: Fiona, are you all right?*

*Fiona: Yes, but I don't understand. I'm supposed to be beautiful.*

*Shrek (sighs): But you are beautiful.*

Now let's compare the book *Shrek!* and its adaptation *Shrek* on the basis of Narrative techniques and Cinematographic techniques and see that how animated graphics and cinematic visual- effects enchanted the audience whereas the words in the book fail to create any magic. As far as narrative techniques are concerned, William Steig as a Heterogeitic writer narrates the story of an ogre but he fails to develop an emotional attachment between the ogre Shrek and the readers. Though the selection of words is very interesting but the tone is monotonous and flat.

*One day Shrek's parents hissed things over and decided it was about time their little darling was out in the world doing his share of damage. So they kicked him good bye and Shrek left the black hole in which he had been hatched.*

While in the adapted movie *Shrek* the scriptwriter has skillfully used literary devices to enhance the effect of narrative on the audience. For instance, Satire is generally used to show human weaknesses and flaws and although it is humorous and funny but the message behind it is always serious and the use of punch lines add flavor in it. E.g. King Farquaad of DuLoc is short heighted and thus reflects the triviality or ridiculed nature of power. He wants to be great but doesn't have enough courage to face challenges. When Princess Fiona curiously ask Shrek about king Farquaad, Shrek replies in a satirical way:

Fiona : What of my groom-to-be? Lord Farquaad? What's he like?

Shrek: Let me put it this way, Princess. Men in Farquaad's stature are in short supply. (Laughs)

The use of Irony has been done very smartly as in the first scene itself the movie starts with the story of a princess waiting for his Prince Charming to come and rescue her but suddenly the story is interrupted by Shrek who tears the page from the fairy tale book use that as toilet paper. Later on it seems little bit weird that Shrek, an ogre is quite emotional and sensitive from heart as he shares his feelings with Donkey and that scene touched the hearts of the audience too:

*Shrek: People take a look at me and go Aah! Help! Run! A big, stupid, ugly Ogre. (Sighs) They judge me before they even know me.*

Talking of Symbolism, the most important symbol is green-complexioned Ogre i.e. Shrek. The portrait of Shrek is adapted from the book *Shrek!* to show green colour as the symbol of ugliness, grossness etc. and it is very much obvious in the first section of the movie where Shrek has been shown bathing in a muddy pool, eating worms and other slimy animals but later on with the progress in the story his ugliness gets over shined by his sensitivity and human-like heart which starts beating for the Princess. Donkey symbolizes true friendship, red dragon symbolizes danger but side by side love and passion too and transformation of Fiona into an ogress symbolizes the existence of love in beauty as well as in ugliness.

As far as use of cinematographic techniques is concerned, the director has magnificently done his work. The Aerial Shots or Establishing Shots in the movie when Shrek and Donkey start their journey to rescue the princess has been taken so beautifully that it clearly visualizes the new beginning of Shrek's life with friendship and love. Again the bridge scene when Shrek and Donkey try to cross the river of molten lava, the aerial shot along with terrific background sound inject excitement and fun into the audiences. The Close-up shots in the movie marvelously explore the ripples of emotions on the characters' faces like romantic moments between Shrek and Fiona especially when Shrek tries to express his emotions by looking into Fiona's eyes but stops himself. Likewise, the Full shots, High angle shots and Low angle shots are used to describe the character more nicely whether be it short-heighted King Farquaad with treacherous look, huge and weird Shrek but with innocence on his face, two drastically opposite forms of Fiona in which one is sophisticated and beautiful princess and another one is a huge green ogress, funny but witty donkey and ferocious red Dragon whose close-up shots reveal that she is deeply in love with the donkey.

Whenever a reader reads a book or a viewer watches a movie there are few questions which keep on reverberating in his/ her mind like ‘What does the text/movie has to do with you personally?’, ‘How much the text/movie agree or disagree with your view of the world and what do you think is right or wrong?’, ‘How well does the text address things that you personally care about and consider important in the world?’ etc and answers of such questions become the foundation of Reader’s Response Theories and Audience Response Theories. The critics like David Bleich, Michael Steig, Michael Slatoff, Stanley Fish and Norman Holland came out with the Individualists reader-response theories to convey how knowledge and experience of each individual person recreates a text. On the other hand, in the Uniformists, famous critic like Wolfgang Iser propagated that a literary text is not just a story to be heard all the time. Infact, it is an effect which should be explained after experiencing it. He believed that text creates certain polarities and the readers have to wander within those limits making expectations, meanings, finding words in unsaid things and filling the gaps left by the author of the text. Hence, text controls the readers not anything else. Another German reader’s response critic Hans-Robert Jauss presented his views on the ‘Horizon’ of reader’s expectations and the perspectives to read novels and find meanings out of them. In reference of these views it can be said that the author of the story *Shrek!*, William Steig tried his best to pen down a unique narrative but it couldn’t affect the readers much. Readers didn’t find any gaps to be filled and thus their excitement couldn’t reach up to the level of satisfaction. As far as audience’s response to its adapted animation is concerned, it set a landmark in the history of world of Animation. The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) proposed by Mark Levi and Sven Windahl very beautifully proves this point in the movie *Shrek*. Everybody wants to be loved and cared by others and if they don’t get it then they start making a wall around themselves to live a life of solitude. Shrek, inspite of being an Ogre, wants people to know him first before judging him. He himself confesses that his persona is like an onion with many layers. Audiences easily identify themselves with his character. Similarly, this movie has also dealt with the very important theme of Beauty and Ugliness. By going to the depth of the movie, it is found that real beauty is hidden in true love and not in physical appearance as it can be seen in the case of Shrek’s love for Princess Fiona (as human and ogress both) and Dragon’s love for the donkey. King Farquaad’s hypocrisy and selfishness too reflects the corrupted part of the society.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude it can be said that the world of literature has undergone a massive change. From oral tradition of folklore literature has become a world of visual art. Literature and Cinema have never been found to be compatible to one another, but today, Cinema with advanced technologies is creating literature. The Adapted movie *Shrek* too created the book once again so that people want to read the story to imagine all the visual scenes through the magic of words and try to add new meaning to it.



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